The Ballarat Naturalist

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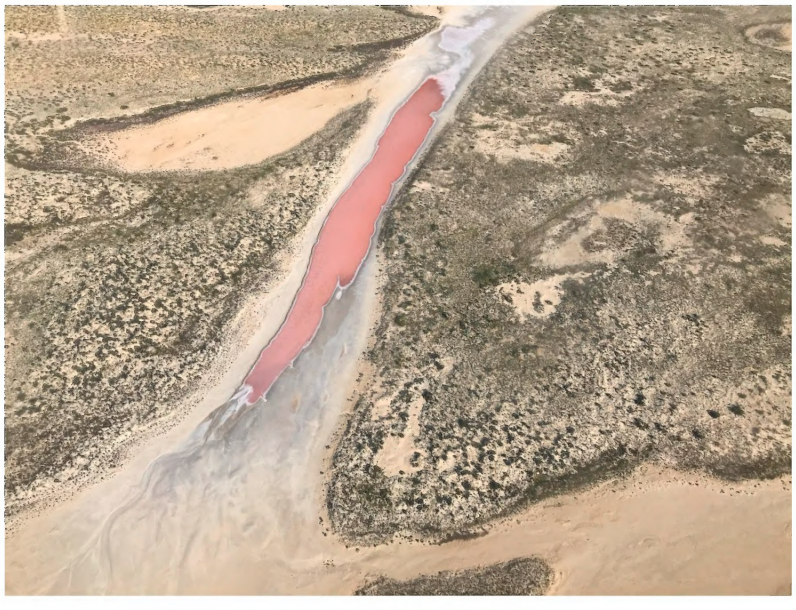
March 7th 2025 Members Presentations titled
Natural jewels of the Australian desert
which followed our AGM

Claire and Peter Dalman showed a selection of pictures taken on various desert trips – some flowers, trees, mound springs, Lake Eyre, Flinders Ranges and probably our favourite, a Thorny devil (*Moloch horridus*).– below We had hoped to find one so were pleased to encounter it in Francois Peron National Park in W.A. We removed it from a sandy track. Claire held it, discovering that the "thorns" are soft, and it was very docile. We gently poured water on it because that is how they obtain moisture. Of interest were bright red, small seeds in ground litter at Broome Bird Observatory. These *Abrus precatorius* (Crab eye bean) are extremely toxic – one can kill an adult. We noted that birds and animals knew to avoid them. Red really does spell danger.

Alasdair Wardle and Sue Grey-Smith showed several photos from Mt Gibson Station in WA, 2021 being a great year for wildflowers. This conservation property is operated by Australian Wildlife Conservancy. A 45 sq. kilometre enclosure protects endangered animals such as Bilbies, Woylies, Numbats and Greater Stick Nest Rats. The removal of grazing and feral animals has seen flora thrive in this arid landscape.

Angela Aldred recounted some of the "jewels" encountered on her trip to the arid Cape Range in the Ningaloo Coast World Heritage Area of Western Australia. The limestone Cape Range runs parallel to the sea, with plummeting gorges and spectacular red cliffs, abundant with wildlife. Endangered Black flanked Rock wallabies (*Petrogale lateralis*) hunched under shady rock shelters in the heat of the day. Ospreys and Eastern reef egrets, and their nests were also observed on rocky outcrops high in the magnificent cliff faces.

Neville Oddie presented several photos of his flight over Kati Thanda (Lake Eyre) in August 2023. He spoke of the amazing and varied imagery of the lake from above. Part of the flight followed a path from the Warburton Groove in the north down to the deeper south end of the lake. He referred to the colours of the channels, the salt, the lake and the surrounding desert areas (see photo).
A precious jewel of inland Australia indeed!"



Val Hocking showed some highlights of a tour in 2023 along the Savannah Way which begins near Katherine NT and follows below the Gulf of Carpentaria and into north Qld. Visits included exploring 2 huge stations, one now owned by Australian Wildlife Conservancy. The properties had thermal creeks and ponds and attractive rivers as well as the vast Savannah woodland vegetation. On 2 occasions we saw the bower of the Great Northern Bowerbird and his *jewels* of white and bluish green shells etc. His call is similar to a Wattle-bird and although a plain grey colour, he displays with a pink crest when courting the female.

Cymbopogon ambiguous, or Australian lemon-scented grass is a plant species in the Family Poaceae and Tribe Andropogonacea. Also in this group are other lemon grasses, barbwire grass and silver grasses. It has fragrant, bluish-green, grey leaves and fluffy seed heads. It is self-fertile. It is a true savannah grass, requiring a sunny position and tolerant of extreme dryness, growing in a wide range of soils and needing very little water to grow. It can grow to a height of 1.8 m. It is also a culturally significant plant. Infusions and concoctions of ***Cymbopogon ambiguous*** have been used in traditional Aboriginal medicine to treat headaches, chest infections and muscle cramps. I photographed my observed plant just over the border in far NW Queensland near Hells Gate Roadhouse. It is a beautiful plant – truly a jewel of the Australian desert.

Andy Arnold

I took a liberal approach to interpreting the term "natural jewels", briefly spotlighting several aspects of Australia's deserts that I see as jewels: the sparkling Kati Thanda (Lake Eyre), precious stone giants like Mt Sonder and Gosse Bluff, the glistening pools and billabongs in gorges, traditional custodians like the delightful Aunty Daphne at Areyonga, the gleaming purple plains of polished "gibber", the glamorously dressed-up Spinifex Pigeons, giant reptiles like Perentie, and the extraordinary plants: Honey Grevillea (*G. eriostachya*) at Uluru (Ayers Rock), Rock Isotome (*Isotoma petraea*), Central Australian Cabbage Palms *Livistona mariae* in Palm Valley, White Indigo *Indigofera leucotricha*, Burke's Swainson-pea *Swainsona acuticarinata*, Yellow-keeled Swainson-Pea *S. flavicarinata*, Hairy and Pink Mulla Mulla *Ptilotus helipteroides* and *P. exaltatus* respectively, Sturt's Desert Rose

Gossypium sturtianum and South Australia's stunning floral emblem, Sturt's Desert-pea *Swainsona formosa*.

Emily Noble

Uluru—Ayer's Rock with *Grevillea eriostachya*

MARCH 2025 OUTING – NORTH GARDENS WETLANDS, LAKE WENDOUREE AND MACARTHUR PARK WETLANDS (Miners Rest).

The day was warm and mostly sunny, but not unpleasantly hot, and we could find shade for most of our time together.

A brief introduction to the North Gardens Wetlands explained the origin and design of the three wetlands pools, the litter traps, the current artificial water flow from the Ring Road bore, and alterations that had been made since the start, which was only 23 or 24 years ago. We noticed a few of the original old Swamp Gums, some now dead, but others still going, including some younger ones that have regenerated.

As we walked, we also noticed a surprising downhill slope to the lake from Gregory Street to Wendouree Parade, demonstrated by the large difference in the water levels of the second and bottom ponds. Large clumps of planted rushes were Giant Rush, (*Juncus ingens*), the world's largest Juncus species. It is naturally a plant of the Murray Valley, not the Ballarat district.

A White-faced Heron greeted us as we crossed Wendouree Parade to the Lake. Soon afterwards, some of us glimpsed "not a wattle-bird", but a hawk, mostly likely a Collared Sparrowhawk. Unfortunately, it was not viewed clearly before it flew.

Aquatic plants identified included Lake Water-milfoil (*Myriophyllum salsugineum*), Eel Grass (*Vallisneria spiralis*), Fennel Pondweed (*Stuckenia pectinata*), Tiny Duckweed (*Wolffia australiana*), which we were told is the world's smallest

flowering plant. Mostly, however, it reproduces vegetatively, by growing then splitting apart. Not long afterwards, we were looking at a duckweed-like plant that was an aquatic liverwort (*Ricciocarpus)*. At first glance it resembles the Azolla, but it has clustered black "roots". We saw where water for the Lake from another source – Paul's Wetlands in Dowling Street - entered at the Swan Pool, near Pipers'. The Lake's evaporation for February was probably 150 mm or more.

Members were intrigued by the flowering and fruiting mechanism of the Eel-weed (*Vallisneria australis*), whose female flowers rise to the surface (but no further) on a long straight stem, where they are wind-pollinated by the floating male flowers (which we unfortunately did not see). The fertilised female flowers are then drawn down to the mud by means of their once-straight stem coiling like a spring to draw the maturing fruit down to the bottom. These coiled stems were quite numerous in the water of the Swan Pool. Moving after lunch to Macarthur Park, we were introduced to another impressive artificial wetland, again with mostly indigenous plants, and this time also including rocks, carefully-placed dead trees and other pleasing landscaping features. It was not long before we found a flock of 40 or 50 Grey Teal, plus a few other waterbirds.

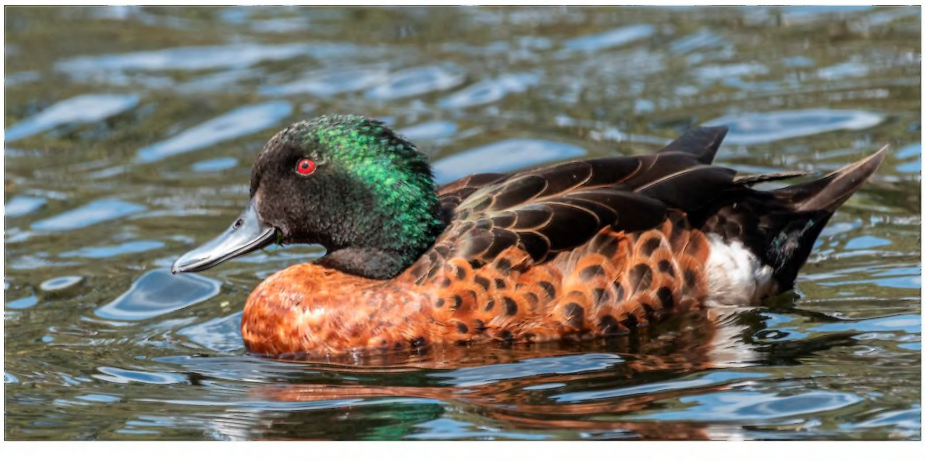
We had set ourselves a challenge at the start of the day to discover a third butterfly (after Common Brown and Cabbage White). This was achieved relatively late in the day, with the discovery of possibly a Common Grass-blue on heads of Jersey Cudweed. This was a very small, fast-moving butterfly – unfortunately too brisk for positive identification.

Dragonflies and damselflies were not common, but we saw a few different species.

Various waterplants were identified here, including Water Pepper (*Persicaria hydropiper)* and River Club-rush (*Schoenoplectus tabernaemontani)* and Azolla *rubra* - not a duckweed but a fern.

After lots of scanning the skies by our leader, hoping for a hawk of some sort, we were eventually rewarded with a Brown Goshawk overhead, rising in circles with not much movement of its wings. At about this time, we also came across several Chestnut Teal, with the glossy green head of the male being a stand-out feature. Macarthur Park Wetlands is the most reliable spot for this species in the Ballarat district.

We departed for home in the middle of the afternoon, having enjoyed all that these wetlands had to offer at the end of a very dry summer. Report by Roger Thomas Images Carol Hall



Male and female Chestnut Teal

Common Bronzewing North gardens

John P later visited the North Gardens wetland again and found our commemorative tree planting plaque on the island section

Excerpts from the Minutes of the 72nd FNCB Annual General Meeting Friday 7th March 2025

Opening and Welcome Acting Chairperson Neville Oddie welcomed 22 members and two visitors in person and seven members via Zoom
Apologies have been received from: Wayne Walker and Mark Moravec.

Minutes of Previous (71st) A.G.M. were read by Secretary, Emily Noble.
President's Report: Neville Oddie, Acting Chairperson, presented the Annual President's Report in lieu of an elected President and on behalf of the FNCB Committee.

Treasurer's Report: Kathy Elder presented her Annual Treasurer's Report comprising the "Statement of Income & Expenses", "Statement of Financial Position" and "Discovering Ballarat's Bushland Book Sales Income & Expenses Report" for the End of Financial Year, noting the Club's very healthy financial position in large part thanks to booming book sales.

Election of Office Bearers and general committee members: Neville Oddie vacated the Chair and Peter Dalman stepped-up to officiate the elections. Before beginning the elections, he took the opportunity to acknowledge the valuable and much-appreciated contributions of Margaret Rich who had decided to step down from the Committee after three years (including two as President allowing immediate Past-President Bill Elder peace of mind as he stepped-down for health reasons) and Graeme Lunt after five years of service . He noted that thankfully Graeme was happy to continue managing the IT needs of the Club despite stepping-down from the Committee. Peter endorsed the warm sentiments about the contributions of both Club members and Committee members that were expressed by Neville Oddie in his Annual President's Report, and thanked Neville particularly for stepping-up to the extra responsibility of chairing many of the previous year's Club Meetings in the absence of an elected President. Particular thanks were also issued to the Club's Secretary Emily Noble and Treasurer Kathy Elder for their considerable contributions over the last year, and to John Petheram who served as a Committee Member for part of the year and continues to work hard on many Club-related initiatives. Peter then commenced the election process, reading each nomination, proposer and seconder, asking whether there were any

other nominations for that role, and, in the absence of any other nominations, announced that each nominee was elected as per the Table below.

Nominees elected

President:	Neville Oddie
Vice President:	vacant
Secretary:	Emily Noble
Assistant Secretary	Sheree Cartledge
Treasurer:	Kathy Elder
Newsletter Editor:	Val Hocking
Committee:	Andrew Arnold, Max Thompson, Alasdair Wardle and Sue Grey-Smith

Peter warmly welcomed the two new members to the Committee (Alasdair and Sue) and congratulated all elected Committee members, wished them well for the coming year and thanked them in anticipation of another great year for the Club. Peter also commended committee involvement to other club members, with one vacancy remaining on the general committee. He then handed-over to newly elected Club President, Neville Oddie, who noted that he felt humbled by the appointment to his new role, appreciated the faith shown in the Committee by members and thanked those committing to Committee roles.

General Business: Set the Club's Annual Membership Fees for 2025 -2026. The Committee recommended to members that, given the Club's solid financial position, membership fees stay at 2024-25 levels..

Membership fees are currently:

Ordinary Member (Adult)	$35.00
Family	$55.00
Distant Member	$20.00
Student Member	$15.00

Newsletter Postage will be increased to $16.50 to reflect the increased price of stamps. Carried

Kathy pointed out that membership fees are now due as above. Preferred payment method is via EFT but payments by cash or cheque can still be made. Details see page 14

The Annual General Meeting closed at 8.13pm.and the March 2025 Club Meeting immediately followed the AGM.

Excerpts from **FNCB Club Meeting Minutes 7.30pm, March 7th, 2025 Held in person and via Zoom**

Opening and Apologies
Attendance: Newly-elected Club President Neville Oddie welcomed 22 members and two visitors in person and five members via Zoom
Apologies: Wayne Walker and Mark Moravec.

Business Arising from Previous Club Meeting on February 7, 2025

- FNCB membership of Friends of Canadian Corridor was renewed as approved in Feb.
- FNCB membership of FNCV renewed as approved at Feb. Club Meeting.
- Good news: the speed limit on Morgan St, Sebastopol adjacent to a new wetland has now been reduced from 80kph to 60kph as FNCB requested (the new signs are up).
- Kathy provided an update on getting a hard-copy of Susan Kruss's PhD Thesis printed and bound to last for the long-term, including quoted costs of printing and binding at White's Law Bindery and Officeworks. If any members are interested in purchasing a leather-bound hard copy (max. cost $288.00), please let Kathy know via email ASAP (elder17kathy@gmail.com). A discount will apply if more than four copies are ordered, and the Committee will also consider covering part of the purchase cost for members, with an amount to be determined based on the number of members interested in buying a copy.

Business Arising from Correspondence:

- There is an opportunity to join the SEANA (South East Australian Naturalists Association) Committee as a representative of FNCB. They hold just a few meetings a year, all via Zoom except those that take place at the SEANA Autumn and Spring Camps. John G explained that they try to have representatives from Club's right across Victoria. Please contact Emily if you are interested in joining this Committee on FNCB's behalf.
- Claire thanked Elspeth for offering to represent the FNCB at the Ballarat Friends Forum.
- Please let Emily know if you would like to represent the FNCB at "Let's Chat" (see the Correspondence Report for more details).

Reports:

Treasurer's Report

Opening bal. as at Feb. 7, 2025: $10,381.82
Income $374.00
Expenses: $140.00
Closing bal.: $10,615.82

SEANA Spring Camp 2025 Update: Happily, both Friday and Saturday night guest speakers have been confirmed:
Nicole Kearney from Biodiversity Heritage Library on Fri. and Richard Weatherly, well-known author, artist, ornithologist & regenerative farmer on Sat. night.

General Business

Sunday 9th March field trip, 9.30am–3pm: "Birds and aquatic plants at North Gardens Wetlands, Lake Wendouree and Macarthur Park Wetlands" to be led by Roger Thomas.

Planning for next year's Calendar of Activities is almost complete. Please let Emily know if you have a suggestion for field trip destinations and/or leaders for July or August.

Other general business: Neville made an observation about the timing of our meetings and field trips and asked members to consider whether there was any scope/ desire to change dates if they fall on public holidays.

Show & Tell/ Field Reports

- Wayne told us of being up in the fire tower on Mt Buninyong when the bushfire started earlier this week, noting how quickly it took hold and started spreading. Consequently, he was re-located to the fire tower on Cherry Tree Hill, Linton, where White-throated Needletails flew straight at the windows, veering-off just at the last moment.

Special Item: Member's Images- Eight members (Emily, Andy, Val, Angela, Alasdair, Neville, Claire and Peter D) provided presentations on the theme of "Natural Jewels of the Australian Desert", broadly interpreting the theme and sharing great images and stories from across Australia.

Next Meeting: "Trust for Nature's history, vision and reserves" to be presented by Steven Lynch, the new Director of Conservation at Trust for Nature.

When? Friday 4th April 2025, 7.30pm in person at the Federation University building at the corner of Gillies St & Gregory St, Wendouree or via Zoom

FNCB Membership for 2025 is now due:
Ordinary Member (Adult) $35
Family $55
Distant Member $20
Student Member $15
Newsletter Postage $16.50

Please pay as soon as possible. Direct Deposit into FNCB's bank account (details below) is the preferred payment method. You are also welcome to pay with cash or cheque at the April Club meeting if you prefer. Or pay via cash or cheque at any branch of the Bendigo Bank, using the details below and ask them to include your surname as the reference.

Thank you to those members who have already paid their membership renewal for 2025.

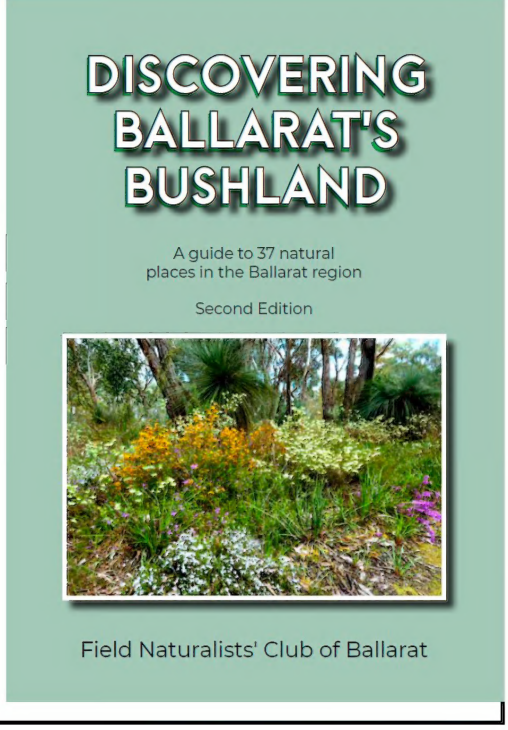
Bank Account Details:
Account Name: Field Naturalists Club of Ballarat Inc.
BSB: 633 000
Account Number: 119 112 290
Reference: Your Name

Discovering Ballarat's Bushland book sales

Books can be purchased from our Treasurer Kathy

We have also secured the help of some local outlets to sell the book. They include:- Collins Books, Lydiard St & Bridge Mall, Tourist Info Centre Sturt Street, Eureka Centre Gift Shop, Buninyong Tourist Info centre

FNCB members $10
Other FNC Members $12
Retail $15


DISCOVERING BALLARAT'S BUSHLAND
A guide to 37 natural places in the Ballarat region
Second Edition
Field Naturalists' Club of Ballarat

Ballarat SEANA 17-19th Oct The subcommittee will meet on Thur 3rd April at 12MD at Kathy's home. Continue to think how you can assist over that weekend please

Our Next meeting is Friday 4th April at 7.30 pm at Fed Uni Campus Gregory st and by zoom
Guest Speaker Steven Lynch Director of Conservation at Trust for Nature.
Topic-*Trust for Nature's History, Vision and Reserves*

A Volunteer is needed to write up a report for our Newsletter please!

Sunday 6th April field trip-to Mt Elephant area
Meet as usual at campus of Federation Uni at corner of Gregory Street and Gillies Street. Meet to leave at 9.30am sharp.
Bring all usual items, including lunch. Share car travel if possible.

We will travel down Glenelg Highway to Scarsdale then travel via Cape Clear through Lismore to Derrinallum. Entrance to Mt. Elephant Reserve precinct is about 1 km past Derrinallum town limit. Drive to Mt. Elephant Reserve should take no more than an hour. People travelling separately to Mt. Elephant can meet us on-site at 10.30am. There are toilets in Derrinallum main street.
At 10.30am, meet with Lesley Brown from Mt. Elephant Reserve Committee for a briefing and access to visitor centre. Those wishing to walk to summit of the mount will have time to do so.

At 12.30pm, drive to Deep Lake, about 4km from Derrinallum, for lunch. There is a campground including toilets. There is also a water bird population for observation, and opportunity for walking.

At 1.30pm, drive to Lake Tooliorook, about 15min drive from Derrinallum. Be amazed by fields of stone! (Different from stony rises!) This lake also has camping ground, toilets, and water bird population.

At 2.30pm, drive via Lismore back to Ballarat. If interested, and there is time, we can detour from Cape Clear to inspect the Happy Valley Streamside Reserve (a crossing over the Woady Yaloak River on the SW corner of the Mt. Erip Reserve).
Return to Ballarat by 4.00pm.
Please volunteer to write up this event for the Newsletter

Meetings and Excursions

Fri April 4th Guest Speaker Steven Lynch *Trust for Nature's History, Vision and Reserves*

Sun April 6th field trip led by Neville Oddie to Mt Elephant area

Future events
Fri May 2nd To Be confirmed
Sun May 4th Elspeth Swan & Paul Norquay Linton Block and other sites

Volunteers are needed to write up these events for our newsletter please.

Next Committee meeting Tues April 22nd at 7.30 pm on zoom

Club meetings are normally held on 1st Friday of the month at 7.30 pm at the Federation Uni Gillies St Campus (corner of Gillies and Gregory Sts, Lake Wendouree),

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Email: Secretary:- Emily Noble
Editor: Val Hocking
Treasurer Kathy Elder
Website: http://fieldnatballarat.wordpress.com
Club email: ballaratfnc@gmail.com
Meetings - in person and may continue to be held via Zoom.
Members will be kept informed of arrangements each month.

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